

#206 ED KACZOR: USS *ANTARES*

John Martini (JM): Today is December 4 . . .

--: Any time.

JM: Okay. Today is December 5, 1991. This is an oral history tape with Mr. Ed. Kaczor. We're at the Waikiki Sheraton Honolulu. My name is John Martini, National Park Service. On December 7, 1941, Mr. Kaczor was aboard flagship USS *ANTARES*. At that time, he was a Second Class Storekeeper, twenty-three years of age. This tape is made in conjunction with the National Park Service and television station KHET in Honolulu.

And good morning, thanks for coming, Mr. Kaczor.

Ed Kaczor (EK): Thank you.

JM: How did you get into the Navy and when was it?

EK: Oh, I got in the Navy in 1938. At that --- but at that time, I had to wait nine months, because you had to have a high school education, C average, no broken bones, no teeth missing and no record whatsoever -- police record. And they were only taking two out of a hundred.

JM: There were that many applicants?

EK: There were a lot of applicants but they were rejected because one thing or another. But I finally got in and sent up to Great Lakes [*Naval*] Training Station. There was 120 in our company, and when we graduated, there was only eighty left, because of demerits and so forth, and they were pretty strict.

JM: Were there so many applicants because of the depression? Is that why so many went?

EK: It was mostly due to the depression that you had so many applicants applying for the Navy and the Army, and so forth.

JM: When did you get aboard *ANTARES*?

EK: First I was --- I put in for the -- we had choice of ships when we graduated from Great Lakes. And I put in for the New Mexico and they sent me to Long Beach and put me on a heavy cruiser, the *ASTORIA*. And from Long Beach, we went down to Panama and I was transferred to the *ARGONNE*, the flagship, because I was a musician at that time. They wanted music. But then after a couple weeks, I refused because I didn't come in the Navy for that. They transferred me then to the *ANTARES*, in Panama then.

JM: About when was that?

EK: January of 1939.

JM: January of '39. You'd been with her for quite a while by the time the attack took place.

EK: Oh yeah. We --- over three years I was on one ship.

JM: She a good ship?

EK: Very good, 'cause it's a supply ship and there's always going to different ports and supplying the Navy. See, when we went up to Cuba and then I worked in the post office there for three months. We went up to Norfolk. We were supposed to go to the World's Fair, but then we got called back to the Pacific Ocean because the Japanese were in the Pacific. And so we come back. We were the only supply, at one time, between Pearl Harbor and for the Navy. When we first come here, there was only two Quonset huts and seven people working in supply department. Nineteen forty-five, there was over 7,000, so you know how it grew.

JM: You bet.

EK: But we were the only source of supply at that time, run back and forth to the States.

JM: So you were going from the States to Hawaii. Did you ever go the other way, Johnson Island, Midway, and all that?

EK: Well, we also had runs like to Johnson Island, Palmyra Island, Canton Island, Midway Island. And we took construction crews up there to build air bases. Those islands were uninhabited at that time, except Midway. They had a little hotel up there for Pan-Air, and that burned while we were up there.

JM: For the China clippers, right?

EK: Yeah.

JM: On December 6, the *ANTARES* was at sea. Where were you bound for?

EK: We stopped -- from Canton Island, we stopped at Palmyra Island and we picked up a barge and we towed it. We were towing that barge into Pearl Harbor at that time.

JM: A barge?

EK: Yeah. See, they used to unload on barges and then tugs would take them into shallower water.

JM: You want to describe what went on, early in the morning of December 7?

EK: Well, prior to that, though, while we were at Canton Island, His Majesty's Ship, the *LEANDER*, come in, notified us that the Japanese are holding maneuvers up by the Kwajaleins, the Gilberts.

JM: Okay.

EK: And two, three days later, we asked for an escort and you couldn't anchor there because of the volcano. You know, over 300 feet of --- we didn't have chip, an anchor chain that long. So we had to be under way all the time. Anyway, the destroyer come and every night, we'd have our lights on. We'd head northwest and cruiser, or a destroyer would follow us with her lights off. But we didn't get any interruptions, or anything like that.

JM: This was in case the Japanese should . . .

EK: Yeah.

JM: . . . try to interfere with your movements.

EK: Yeah, interfere with. But they didn't.

JM: Was there a fear or knowledge among the crew that the Japanese might try something hostile?

EK: Well, we figure, well, maybe they'll challenge us or something like that, but they never did.

JM: Mm-hm.

EK: We'd go there during the night and then come back in the morning, and unload again, at Canton Island. But we knew at that time there was something going on.

JM: Something going on. So . . .

EK: Oh, the morning of Pearl Harbor, everybody slept at 4:30 in the morning, getting ready for port entry. You have your emergency wheel at the watch, in case your main one went off, you had one steering, you had hand control and you had -- and I was up on deck at that time. And you know, we were anticipating getting into the harbor because we had to wait for the pilot to come out, let us through the harbor. So we spread them out the harbor, waiting and at six o'clock in the morning, we spotted a Japanese submarine.

JM: Describe what it looked like when you first saw it.

EK: Well, we knew the Japanese had two-man submarines. And when we seen that object over there, our quartermaster is the first one that spotted it, and then we watch and then our commodore told us that -- he was a captain, but he was a commodore too, in the Navy -- and he sent a dispatch to the *WARD* to go over there and investigate. They went over there and dropped some depth charges and they shot at it and knocked it out of the water.

JM: Can you describe exactly where that two-man sub was at the time when you first spotted it?

EK: It was near the beach, over on the right hand side, the port side. But I don't know.

JM: Just the conning tower out of the water, the periscope, or how much could you see?

EK: Yeah, you could see the periscope out of the water.

JM: Uh-huh.

EK: And so we knew something was wrong and they sunk it then.

JM: Was your position on deck?

EK: I was on deck.

JM: So you had a good view then?

EK: Oh yeah. We had a wonderful view.

JM: Uh-huh.

EK: And what --- but we sent dispatches into Pearl Harbor that, what happened. But evidently, somebody thought we were joking or something, because the messages were never confirmed or nobody ever come back with us or anything.

JM: They . . .

EK: I don't know.

JM: After the --- so were you still waiting? Still going to take the pilot aboard?

EK: Yeah.

JM: About how -- long time ago, but about how far out were you?

EK: We were right at the mouth of the entrance, where the nets go down in the harbor. We were waiting to get in.

JM: Okay.

EK: The pilot has to come out and we were waiting for the -- well, we got the pilot out, but then we still had to wait at eight o'clock so they could lower the net, so we could get in.

JM: Also, they weren't going to open it for you. You had to wait for . . .

EK: No.

JM: . . . for special time.

EK: No, we had to wait until we get permission to come in.

JM: Mm-hm.

EK: And well, five minutes to eight, we seen all these planes come in over Schofield, you know, from Schofield, and also down to Kaneohe Bay and then we went around Barbers Point. And the torpedo plane, the one that come up and he circled our ship and strafed it. And he was so close that you could see, I mean, he waved and we waved back. But the captain kept hollering, "Get under cover," but I stayed on top and watched it. And then I went up on the bridge and had the binoculars there when they started bombing and look in the harbor. You could see right straight into Ford Island, all the ships and everything, from where we were, at the mouth. So we stayed there for quite a while, and then we had to drift out a little farther, 'cause the ships started coming out.

JM: What kind of ships were the ships coming out?

EK: Well, the destroyers and the cruisers.

JM: Did they seem like they were in a hurry when they were coming out?

EK: Oh yeah. They really coming out, fast as they could, but then we got orders to go to Aloha Tower and tie up there, just so we wouldn't interfere. We didn't have very little oil left aboard ship and we didn't have any food left, 'cause we ate rice for a couple days. So we were glad to get --- that's what we were anticipating, get her supplies and get some food aboard ship.

JM: Have, have you ever seen the movie, "Tora, Tora, Tora?"

EK: Yeah, I seen it.

JM: The movie shows the *ANTARES* and the sub.

EK: Yeah.

JM: Did you get any impression that sub might have been trying to follow you into the harbor?

EK: I figured that they might have followed us into the channel and then sink us the channel. Because, see, we didn't have no emergency dogs, you know, compartments or . . .

JM: Watertight?

EK: Yeah, watertight. 'Cause one shot would have sunk us, 'cause we were wide open. But see, the plane that strafed us, we followed that in, and she went in and she dropped her torpedo, and it went right through the *OGLALA*, and hit the helm and exploded in the helm, or the *OGLALA* sunk.

JM: When you first heard the planes coming in, did you know what was going on? Did any of that go through your mind, that gee, maybe this is some sort of fancy exercise?

EK: No, because prior to that, we --- of course, we were in Pearl Harbor quite a bit, you know, off and on. And once in a while, the Army and Navy planes that come in over the harbor, run torpedo runs on these ships. And that morning we thought, well, maybe that's what they were doing. Even when the Japanese plane come around, and we seen the big . . .

JM: Hanamura? The big red . . .

EK: You know, the sun on it? We thought, well, maybe they were taking turns, you know, until they machine gunned us. You know, they were picking sides.

JM: Could be, I guess.

EK: Yeah, and then, you know, until they machine gunned us and we realized, hey, this is the real thing.

JM: Would you recognize them as Japanese planes with the ball, or . . .

EK: Oh yeah. We --- well, you can --- when you come so close, you can see the pilot, you know, see his face, why, you know he's close. Went right off our stern.

JM: Oh. If you were up on the bridge, you had binoculars, you had a pretty good bird's eye view?

EK: Oh yeah. You were up high and you get to see right in.

JM: What went through your mind?

EK: I don't know, it just -- of course, you were cautioned, but you know, the things were happening like that and then you could see the ships getting blown up, the guys jumping in the water, and later on the water is starting to burn and guys swimming in it and so. 'Cause when we come in three days later, come back and you see the oil was real thick in the water and debris all over. And we parked, or docked right across from the *OKLAHOMA*, and you could still hear the people on the *OKLAHOMA* pounding on the inside, trying to get out. Let 'em know they were still alive. They were in there for quite a few days and they finally give up.

JM: You could actually hear them?

EK: Oh, you can hear 'em, yeah. It was real loud. But you couldn't do anything about it.

JM: Looking back fifty years later, what's the single most vivid memory that you have of the attack and the period right after?

EK: Well, it's a different feeling because it's something that you didn't expect, you know. Like somebody is coming behind you and hit you with a ball bat. You didn't expect it. You know, you don't think about your -- it's a lot different when somebody is coming at you with a ball bat, you know, you anticipate it. This you didn't anticipate and it, I don't know, forget the feeling you get, except (crying)

I get so

JM: Is it hard coming back after fifty years to see it again?

EK: No, I've been back here four times since that time, but this is probably my last time, unless I bring my children over to show 'em. It was a lot worse after the war, though. I mean, after Pearl Harbor.

JM: How long did you stay with *ANTARES*?

EK: I --- we got guns and ammunition. We got the twenties, forties, three-inch, five-inch, and then we went south to Samoa and then Tongan Islands. And then we went over to New Caledonia, then I got transferred off to the amphibious base there. And then later on, I went over to New Guinea on land base in the invasion. Administration, we set up bases. We go in there and occupy it and then while I was there, I got the notice that three years at overseas, you have to get back to the States. So they sent me back, but that wasn't very good, 'cause when I come back, I got on a tank transport. They

built two big ones, the *ALPINE* [APA-92] and the *BARNSTABLE* [APA-93]. And those were where you carry 2,500 troops, 600 crew and you had like Guam, Wake and the Philippines, Okinawa and some of these other islands you hit. And we unloaded these Marines and troops. But then, within the 200 mile radius of these islands, you always see the Japanese planes come in and you know they're going to commit suicide.

JM: Kamikaze?

EK: Kamikazes and we got, oh, about a dozen times we just got missed. But when we were in Leyte, we got hit with a suicide, and then, again, we got hit at Okinawa on Easter Sunday, and our ship almost sunk at that time.

JM: Oh.

EK: But we lost over 100 men at that time too.

JM: Last . . .

EK: It's a lot worse when you see these planes come in. You know you're going to die if they hit you and, you know.

JM: You made it.

EK: Yeah. Lucky.

JM: Last -- the last question would be that you saw a lot during the war, so you get pretty mad when someone hits you with a baseball bat from behind.

EK: Yeah.

JM: How do you feel about Japan and the Japanese now?

EK: I don't buy any Japanese products. I got a camera and that's the only thing I've bought, 'cause it's the only thing I could find. But of course, I'm a union man and I believe in buying U.S.A. products, that's one of the reasons. I don't have no grudge against the Japanese people, 'cause all these people are pretty young and they don't know what happened, or they don't get it in their histories and so forth, so you can't hold a grudge against the people themselves, you know.

JM: Thank you for coming.

EK: Oh, you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW